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to the village elders and the arbitrators they agree to appoint. The government is not informed, nor does it wish to know what is decided.

This indifference to and independence of the government is carried over to matters of criminal nature, where the law might be expected to take an automatic course. In practice the people rarely invoke the law except in cases of armed robbery. A bandit is not a person towards whom one needs to use any consideration; if he has a family they will probably have disowned him to avoid being held as accomplices in his crimes. Therefore with a bandit one can safely call in the forces of law and order, since no unpleasant social relations with other members of his family are likely to result from such action. But with other kinds of criminals this factor is always present. The villagers themselves prefer to deal with a thief in their own way, sometimes a very drastic way, for if a man is found to be an incorrigible petty thief, the village assembles, sometimes asks and obtains the consent of the man's family, and either drives him out or even puts him to death by drowning. Consequently between the penalties enacted for various crimes and what actually happens to a detected criminal who has committed such a crime, there is often a wide difference. This is nowhere more evident than in crimes of a sexual nature.

Unlike their neighbours to the north, the Na Khi, who still retain a tolerance of pre-nuptial intercourse shocking to the Chinese, the Min Chia have wholly adopted the strict and uncompromising morality of the dominant culture. As has been mentioned, the seduction of a virgin, or even of an unmarried girl previously seduced by another (if such a case occurred), is not merely sin, it is a crime, which is punishable by a sentence of two or three years' imprisonment for the man concerned. The girl is not held guiltless of course, but the law takes no account of her fate, which is left to her

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father's discretion. In former times a father might slay an unchaste daughter, just as a husband could put an adulterous wife to death; this is now expressly forbidden by law, and does not in fact seem to have been the usual fate of erring women, even when it was permitted.

The law is thus, even now, severe, but in practice such cases hardly ever come before the courts. The idea of invoking the law in a public court in matters of this intimate nature is extremely distasteful to the Min Chia, as to the Chinese. These things are family matters to be settled by and in the family itself, or with the assistance of relatives as arbitrators. For this reason it is usually impossible to hear of cases of the graver sexual offences such as incest, for such things are never made public. On the other hand the abduction of girls—with their own consent—is a common event, and admitted to be so. This, of course, comes strictly within the criminal category of seducing an unmarried girl, but it is rare that the case is brought to court.

To understand why this is so needs a word of explanation. Marriage among the Min Chia is arranged by the parents, the parties themselves not being permitted as much as to see one another before the wedding ceremony, and the betrothal often takes place when both children are still almost infants. There is thus no legitimate free sexual selection, no means of legalising the love which a chance meeting may have kindled in an unbetrothed pair. The Min Chia, however, are no more rigidly bound by their own conventions than other peoples, and thus when a young man and a girl meeting and loving by chance, refuse to renounce their passion, there is only one way out. The man abducts the girl and endeavours to get her to his own home. If he succeeds, after a more or less prolonged wrangle between the parents of both parties, and the parents of those to whom the erring couple were betrothed, the marriage is at last recognised, the customary